

Hearing Protection Initiative (FY02-2037)

Impact

Deployments resulted in sparse follow-up data. However, the project had positive ancillary outcomes (see below).

Description

Hearing loss caused by noise is permanent, cannot be medically corrected, and is the most common injury in the Army. Good hearing is vital to the accomplishment of mission, including determining where gunfire is coming from or conducting radio communications. The key is to prevent hearing loss. However, Soldiers conducting military operations or training in urban terrain have avoided the use of hearing protective devices (HPD) because the devices dampen the sounds of speech. This initiative sought to introduce a new Combat Arms Earplug (CAE) that protects hearing while enabling speech sounds to be heard. The goal was to reduce hearing loss to less than 10% of study participants as measured by annual audiometric testing. Approximately 200 Rangers, assigned to military operations in urban terrain, were given an audiometric exam to establish a baseline hearing measurement and fitted with CAEs.

Outcomes

- Due to increased optempo, follow-up audiometric exams on the Rangers were not possible.
- However, the number of audiometric testing stations at the installation increased from 10 stations to 30 stations.
- CAEs were provided to Soldiers at Fort Stewart, Fort Knox, Fort Benning, Fort Jackson, and to Soldiers deployed in Iraq.
- The program was briefed to multiple Commanders and presented at the Military Audiology Short Course.
- The benefits of this device were briefed to many in Army leadership.
- Use of the CAEs by Soldiers resulted in increased demand from other units to also use the devices.

Innovative Features

This initiative introduced a new type of HPD that could overcome one of the most common barriers to consistent use of hearing protection.

Lesson Learned

- Increased operational tempo makes post-deployment data collection nearly impossible.
- Build interim progress measures into a project whenever possible. The measures will provide you with at least some data if the end-point measures cannot be collected.
- Take advantage of every opportunity to raise awareness of specific health issues and preventive measures to address those issues.